



Standard Update

Better Data Through Standards



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The Standard Update, EPA's newsletter about data standards, contains information you can read and reuse whatever your interest in information management may be. For more information on any newsletter topic, see the Environmental Data Registry (EDR) Website at <http://www.epa.gov/edr/>. The EDR Website is your source for Standard Update back issues and a vehicle for reader comments.

Partners

EPA, States, and Tribes Form Partnership Through the Environmental Data Standards Council

To facilitate the development, adoption and implementation of data standards, EPA, States (under the auspices of the Environmental Council of the States [ECOS]) and Tribal representatives have formed an Environmental Data Standards Council. The formation of the Council, which held its first meeting on March 9, 2000, demonstrates EPA's commitment to implement strategic information activities and management reforms in partnership with States and Tribal governments to improve data integration and exchange. The Council's mission is "to promote the efficient sharing of environmental information between EPA, States, Tribes and other parties through the development of data standards." The Council will identify those areas where standardization will have the most valuable environmental results, prioritize the areas, and pursue developing data standards to support these areas.

In addition to the Council's role in reviewing and approving candidates for data standardization, immediate goals include overseeing the formation of a Data Standards Priorities Work group. This work group will be charged with

identifying the next set of data standards to be developed and implemented in the Agency.

The Data Standards Council, which includes 10 representatives from EPA, States, and Tribes, is co-chaired by Mark Luttner, Director of the Office of Information Collection in the EPA Office of Environmental Information (OEI), and Helen Lottridge, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality. For more information on the Environmental Data Standards Council and the Data Standards Priorities Work group, contact Chris O'Donnell in EPA's Office of Environmental Information, 202.260.1324 or odonnell.chris@epa.gov.

Open Forum Attendees Declare the Metadata Conference a Success

Over 200 participants shared information on metadata content, registry development, and related topics at the fourth international Open Forum on Metadata Registries sponsored by EPA and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The Forum, held January 17-21, 2000 in Santa Fe, NM, provided attendees with the opportunity to participate in "tracks" that presented the growing use of metadata registries in health care, environmental protection, statistics and demographics, transportation, aeronautics, and

space. Bruce Abbott, Data Administrator for the Minnesota Department of the Environment, commented that "the Open Forum 2000 was far and away the most informative, productive, and downright fun conference I've ever attended."

Presentations highlighted the wide range of metadata registries and data standards efforts based on the ISO/International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) 11179 standard, which describes the specification and standardization of data elements to make data understandable and shareable. Participants commented that they benefitted from presentations featuring EPA's metadata registry tools—**Environmental Data Registry (EDR)**, **Chemical Registry System (CRS)**, and **Terminology Reference System (TRS)**, and the upcoming release of MetaPro, an EPA-developed, standard-based metadata registry. Abbott stated that MetaPro is being evaluated for use by Minnesota's Department of Natural Resources, which is just beginning a project to develop a department-wide metadata registry and for interagency exchange of metadata.

EPA participant James Rothwell commented that "the environmental information future clearly will use the Internet and standards to share, report, access and understand data." He stated that the Open Forum presentations pointed toward a future that uses an electronic process that heavily depends on a standard data infrastructure. The standard data will use registries, metadata, and other tools such as thesauri to help users understand relationships and generate reports. An example of such a thesaurus was featured in a GEneral Multilingual Environmental Thesaurus (GEMET) presentation that demonstrated how international semantic management can contribute to understanding these relationships. GEMET is a multilingual thesaurus product/tool sponsored jointly by EPA and the European Environmental Agency (EEA).

The Open Forum again succeeded in bringing together new implementors and experienced developers who could share experiences in using metadata registries and related metadata tools. For more information, visit the Open

Forum website at
<http://www.nist.gov/openforum2000/>.

EPA Provides Tools for Sharing Data

EPA developed and made available a suite of tools for supporting metadata standardization and semantics management across Agency systems. These tools are based on the ISO/IEC 11179 standard. The standard was established to foster the sharing of metadata among the members of the international information technology community through a metadata registry standard. Many EPA partners, including State and Federal agencies, are developing registries to manage their metadata.

EPA currently has four metadata registry tools available—the Environmental Data Registry (EDR), the Chemical Registry System (CRS), the Terminology Reference System (TRS), and MetaPro:

- The EDR (<http://www.epa.gov/edr/>) is a single comprehensive source of information about the definition, origin, source, and location of environmental data that supports partnerships between the States and EPA by providing a framework for establishing data standards, electronic reporting, and access to consistent data definitions. The EDR also contains information about data (metadata) from many Agency computer systems.
- The CRS (<http://www.epa.gov/crs/>) supports the Chemical Identification Standard by providing a common, consistent, and convenient way to identify chemical information in EPA databases.
- The TRS (<http://www.epa.gov/trs/>) provides a single source of general Agency terminology that incorporates EPA-related terms, lists, and other environmentally-related terms.
- EPA announced the imminent release of MetaPro at the January 2000 Open Forum on Metadata Registries. MetaPro is a

metadata registry tool based on the ISO/IEC 11179 metadata standard. MetaPro includes the functionality of a metadata registry and a database of standardized and well-formed data elements, which are useful for collecting, reporting and sharing environmental information. MetaPro will help EPA

collaborate with States and other environmental stakeholders to develop shareable data. Initial (beta versions) of hosted and distributable versions will be available in spring 2000. Anyone interested in testing the beta version of the software should contact Larry Fitzwater, 202.260.3071 or fitzwater.larry@epa.gov.

For additional information on Agency data standards activities, contact Chris O'Donnell in EPA's Office of Environmental Information, 202.260.1324 or odonnell.chris@epa.gov.